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SIPDIS

EUR/ERA (JEFFREY GIAUQUE)

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SUBJECT: SPANISH VIEWS ON EVE OF MARCH GAERC

REF: JEFFREY GIAUQUE 03/06/2009 GAERC EMAIL

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Classified By: ADCM William H. Duncan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Poloff discussed anticipated agenda items for the March 16-17 GAERC with MFA European Correspondent Maria Luisa Benitez-Donoso March 13. Benitez-Donoso said the focus will be on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Belarus, with statements made again regarding Sri Lanka, calling for humanitarian relief, and on the planned transition from EUFOR Chad to the UN Mission MINURCAT. Moldova has been removed from the agenda and will be discussed in April.

[¶2.](#) (C) Afghanistan: According to Benitez-Donoso, conclusions have been circulated on Afghanistan, but not yet approved. as there are two outstanding points of contention. Although not a concern for Spain, she said that the proposed EU-Pakistan summit is a problem for other members. Benitez-Donoso said that the second point of contention stems from internal EU politics resulting from Spain's proposed double-hatting of the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan, giving him additional responsibility for Pakistan to mirror Ambassador Holbrooke's mandate. The European Commission is opposed as it does not want to lose its sovereignty and influence in Pakistani issues. Benitez-Donoso said that there will be further discussion of the double-hatting proposal at a PSC meeting March 16.

[¶3.](#) (C) Bosnia and Herzegovina: Benitez-Donoso acknowledged that EUFOR ALTHEA is a concern and that German Secretary of State Silberberg planned to visit Spain to discuss troop levels in Bosnia. According to Benitez-Donoso, Spain will maintain its current troop level until OHR closure, at which point the decision to withdraw or not will be made considering the stability and security of the region at that time. "We are waiting on the next Peace Implementation Council meeting to see how the transition between OHR and the mission will proceed." Spanish Minister of Defense Chacon in the meantime announced the transformation of the ALTHEA operation agreed upon by the EU Defense Ministers during their March 12 meeting. According to Minister Chacon, the ALTHEA mission will (before summer 2009) transform, and the new primary goal will be advising and training Bosnia's armed forces, implying a reduction in military personnel.

[¶4.](#) (C) Belarus: Benitez-Donoso first pointed to the positive steps taken by Belarus, opining that the current strategy is working much as it did in Uzbekistan. The GOS is encouraged by the release of political prisoners, and will support the extension of travel restriction suspension for another 6 months. As to whether Lukashenka will be invited to participate in the Eastern European Partnership summit, Benitez-Donoso said that Spain believes no one should be excluded. She said, however, that the GOS is in a "wait and

see" mode and will carefully monitor the developments in the early-May Belarus Parliamentary decision regarding recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. "In principle, we have no problem with inviting Lukashenka. We believe strongly in states' territorial integrity, however, and will wait to see what develops in the (Belarusian) parliament," she added.

15. (C) Montenegro: Benitez-Donoso said that the Council will accept the first avis (recommendation) from the Commission. She confirmed reluctance regarding Montenegro's integration on the part of Germany and the Netherlands, but stated that "we are very early in the accession process." She said that the GOS has no issue with the accession of Montenegro and suggested that there would be sufficient time for Montenegro to fulfill legal obligations.

16. (C) Sudan: Benitez-Donoso explained that Sudan is not formally on the GAERC agenda at this point, but that there will likely be discussion regarding the ICC arrest warrant. "It is important that we send a unified message to Al-Bashir," she said, adding that he must cooperate with the ICC. They will also consider how the EU can assure that the 105 remaining NGOs are not expelled. For Spain, the primary concern is the humanitarian crisis and refugees, Benitez-Donoso said.

17. (C) MEPP and Iran: Benitez-Donoso said that the March 16 EU Foreign Ministers' lunch discussion will cover the Middle East Peace Process, following up from the Sharm el-Sheikh donor's conference, with no formal conclusions issued. Iran will also likely be discussed, she said, confirming the GOS opposition to France's renewed push for EU sanctions. "The GOS remains committed to the double-track approach," she said, "and will encourage U.S./Iran dialogue."

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CHACON